

MALA RENGANATHAN
EXPLORING THE CANON

Jaydeep Sarangi. Ed. *New Explorations in Indian English Poetry*.
New Delhi: Authorspress, 2007.

Jaydeep Sarangi's edited volume *New Explorations in Indian English Poetry* attempts to offer a holistic perspective on the twentieth and twenty first century Indian poets in English. The nineteen units of the anthology, including an interview by the editor with one of the poets, cover around six well known canonical poets like Sri Aurobindo, Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra, Meena Alexander, and also around ten non-canonical poets like Swami Vivekananda, Arun Kolatkar, O.P. Bhatnagar, Bidhu Padhi, Vikram Seth, D.C. Chambial, R.C. Shukla and also poets of the Indian diaspora like Shanta Acharya, Saleem Peeradina and Tabish Khair.

The first essay "The Two Titans in the realms of Indo-Anglian Poetry" by P. Gopi Chand and P. Naga Suseela begins with a comprehensive overview of Indo-Anglian poets from the nineteenth century to modern times, and ends with a brief discussion of Nissim Ezekiel and A.K.Ramanujan as the two titans. Nevertheless the lopsided discussion deviates attention from the two titans. In the second essay "The Mystic Muse: Poetry of Swami Vivekananda" Subhendu Mund considers Vivekananda a great poet, so far ignored by the canon, inspiring critics such as M.K. Naik to argue that he is a genuine poet and that he is an influential poet in the renescent country.

The next essay by A.K. Jha, on Sri Aurobindo's poetic achievement, discusses the rare qualities of his poetry like his excellent blank verse, skillful use of quantitative metre and how he lays bare a rhythmic life beyond the ranges of inspired consciousness. R. Arunachalam makes a threadbare analysis of A.K. Ramanujan's poem "A River", but the literary analysis gets lost in the linguistic analysis, which is again too technical for non-linguist scholars to comprehend. There are two good articles on Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry, one by Archana Kumar on the poet's syntactic choices and other by Kasthuri Bai on his poetic responses

to contemporary abuses. The first makes a meticulous reading of Mahapatra's poetic syntax and the second one analyses the poet's response to ailments prevalent in society through a poetic idiom.

Among the two essays on Kamala Das' poems, one by Sudhir K. Arora makes an effective examination of the poet's exploration of the female self that oscillates between the ideas of lust and love, and the other by Bikram Kumar Mahapatra compares the confessional mode in Kamala Das' poetry with that of Sylvia Plath. A. Raghu's "The Desperate Kisser: Nissim Ezekiel and the Search for Home" offers a very interesting peek into Ezekiel's personal life when the recurrent motif of a search for home in Ezekiel's poems is seen through the prism of his personal life.

C.L. Khatri's article evaluates Meena Alexander's anthology of poems *Bird's Bright Ring*, which explores the issues of exile, politics and the search for identity. A valid point is made in this article about which yardsticks decide who is diasporic, i.e., whether to consider a poet diasporic based on a few works and whether to consider a writer as diasporic based on the writer or the work of art. The essay by Ashes Gupta makes a close reading of A. Kolatkar's poem "*The Bus*" as an exposition of post-modern poet's 'vacillating duality of existence', i.e., between the duality of his inevitable cultural and traditional roots and his predominantly westernized education. Some introductory discussion on the poet could have provided a clearer context for the readers.

D.C. Chambial attempts a poetic appreciation of O.P. Bhatnagar's lesser known poems from his anthology *Thought Poems*. Pradeep Kumar Patra's studies the 'rain poems' of Bibhu Padhi, the poet from Orissa, in whose poems rain is vivified revealing how integral rains are to Oriyan life. Binod Mishra's re-reading of the same poet and the Lawrentian influences in his poetry is brought to the fore in an interesting and thought-provoking manner through a close reading of his anthology *Living with Lorenzo*, which was inspired by Lawrentian ideas and thoughts. N. Sharada Iyer's "Vikram Seth's *Golden Gate: A Versified Slice of Modern Life*" makes an exhaustive commentary on Seth's verse novel with a detailed discussion on his versification, style, etc.

Sujaat Hussain throws light D.C. Chambial's poem, which according to the critic, gives a 'view of life' (200). Nevertheless the essay is sketchy and does not elaborate on the writer himself in order to state whether the poet's view correlates with his personal life.

The present editor's essay on the need to replace the canon in the post-colonial space of Indian poetry in English discusses briefly the diasporic voice and cultural hybridity in the poems of new diasporic poets like the Orissa born Shanta Acharya, Saleem Peeradina, and Ranchi - born Tabish Khair. Jaydeep Sarangi here recommends a judicious selection from a large range of poets existing today in Indian English poetry. Sarangi's attempt to replace the canon could have been more fruitful only if he had not come to a conclusion that replacing the canon should be done only with diasporic poets living outside India. What about the umpteen number of poets today in India itself, living in places far away from their home states and writing about their home in a place where they live and speak a language alien to them? Should we not also call them diasporic? The final interview with D.C. Chambial by Jaydeep Sarangi once again seems out of place to me in this collection of critical essays on the poetic giants of Indian English poetry.

Overall the critical volume is interesting for its inclusion of research articles on non-canonical writers. Nevertheless the outcome could have been better if proper editing and proof-reading had been done. Some of the articles give the impression that they have been written years back without any care to update information, so much so that a dead author has been brought to life!

While Sarangi's attempt to include essays on non-canonical Indian English poetry is appreciated his non-inclusion of any representative poets from Eastern India (except Mahapatra and Bibhu Padhi) is regrettable. The whole lot of non-canonical contemporary poets like Tamsula Ao, Robin Singh, K. S. Nonkynrih and Anjum Hasan of the North-East, and also poets like Sanjukta Dasgupta from Kolkata merit attention and could have been discussed in one essay at least.